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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000584

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [LO](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT REASSURES AMBASSADOR ON IRAQ, COALITION

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: President Gasparovic told the Ambassador July 13 that there would be continuity in Slovak foreign policy, and that he personally would be playing a larger role in collaboration with his hand-picked Foreign Minister Jan Kubis. He echoed Kubis's promise to coordinate closely with the U.S., Iraq, and coalition partners as Slovakia contemplates withdrawing forces from Iraq. Gasparovic defended Fico's inclusion of the Slovak National Party (SNS) in the coalition, saying it was a more acceptable partner for Smer and HZDS than the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) and that the quick deal had been necessary to avoid a deadlock like that in the Czech Republic. End summary.

Continuity in Foreign Policy

¶2. (C) President Ivan Gasparovic invited the Ambassador for a one-on-one lunch July 13 at the Presidential Palace. He assured the Ambassador that the new government would not make any abrupt changes to Slovakia's foreign policy, saying that there would be continuity and Slovakia would meet its commitments. He told the Ambassador that he and PM Robert Fico had agreed that the President would have a larger role in setting foreign policy than under the Dzurinda government. Gasparovic claimed that he had hand-picked new Foreign Minister Jan Kubis, that he would be collaborating closely with Kubis on foreign policy, and would likely talk to the FM more often than Fico would.

¶3. (C) On Iraq, Gasparovic promised that there would be no sudden, dramatic moves. The new government was committed to its promise to coordinate with Iraq, the U.S., and other coalition partners, and Gasparovic noted that it would be terrible for Slovakia's image to cut and run. Gasparovic, apparently uninformed about Iraqi Coalition planning mechanisms, proposed that "a meeting of the presidents of all the coalition partners should be called to set out a plan to coordinate the missions with the needs of the Iraqis." The Ambassador emphasized the need for Slovakia to stay engaged, and expressed appreciation for Gasparovic's public comments in support of Slovakia's participation.

New Coalition: Nationalists Are Good

¶4. (C) The Ambassador stated that we would judge the new government on its actions rather than its past statements, but also emphasized that protection of minority rights and Roma integration are priorities for the U.S. We would speak out to counter improper statements by coalition partners when appropriate. Gasparovic insisted that the Slovak Nationalist Party was not extremist and posed no threat to Slovak

democracy. He called SNS Chair Jan Slota "nothing more than a big mouth." He said the SMK was as radical as the SNS, claiming that Bugar had threatened that Hungarians would flood the streets if SMK were not included in the government.

Gasparovic complained that Hungarians in south Slovakia discriminated against Slovaks who could not speak Hungarian, for example in employment. He further railed against ethnic-Hungarian Slovak members of the European Parliament as "traitors" for their alleged mobilization of MEPs against Fico. He was critical of his pick Kubis for making his first trip to Hungary and appearing as a supplicant. (Comment: We have long known that Gasparovic was close to the nationalists; SNS supported his presidential bid. However, we did not expect the force with which he expressed his anti-Hungarian sentiments. End comment.)

15. (C) The Ambassador asked about rumors that Fico had been working on a Smer-HZDS-SMK coalition, but at the last hour decided to go with SNS rather than SMK. (Comment: We had heard that Gasparovic weighed in on behalf of SNS. End comment.) Gasparovic said the decision was due to the majority in Smer, and HZDS who would never accept working with Hungarian nationalists. He defended Fico's choice of coalition partners and the speed at which the deal had been done, saying that it avoided an untenable stalemate such as that in the Czech Republic.

16. (C) Comment: Gasparovic obviously wanted to reassure the Ambassador on foreign policy issues, including Iraq, and explain that he would personally be assuming a larger role in policy-making. He is also trying to reassure the international community, which has been critical of Fico's choice of coalition partners, that everything will be OK. We have not yet had a chance to test Gasparovic's influence over foreign policy. We are withholding judgment on the new

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government's less savory partners until we see how its ministers and MPs behave over time.

VALLEE